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# Russian NGOs Working to Fight AIDS Not 'Foreign Agents'

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Several Russian NGOs that deal with HIV/AIDS united to apply to the Global Fund for a grant this year.

Non-governmental organizations working to fight HIV/AIDS in Russia will not be required to register as foreign agents if they receive funding from abroad, Kommersant reported Friday, citing the results of recent inspections by the Justice Ministry.

The inspections, which began in June at the government's request, covered dozens of NGOs working in the sphere of HIV/AIDS throughout the country, including in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tatarstan, and the Kirov, Kursk and Tyumensk regions.

Newspaper Kommersant said Friday the results of the inspections showed none of the organizations were found by the ministry to be conducting political activities, meaning they will not be required to register as foreign agents even if they are funded from abroad.

The news is likely a relief to many representatives of NGOs who have worried about how

to secure financing while at the same time avoiding violating the controversial so-called "foreign agents law," passed in 2012.

According to that legislation, NGOs accepting foreign funding and conducting what the ministry deems to be "political activities" are required to register as foreign agents — a label that, in Russian, carries connotations of espionage.

"It is impossible to explain the position of those doing these checks. Previously, they found politics even in the work of ecologists, but now that is not happening," Ramil Akhmetgaliev, a lawyer for the Agora rights group, said in comments carried by Kommersant on Friday.

Anya Sarang, the president of the Andrei Rylkov Foundation, a grassroots organization that seeks to promote awareness of drug addiction and develop a humane drug policy, told Kommersant that the results of the inspections may stem from Russia's new role as a donor country for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The fund had contributed huge sums of financing to Russia for the fight against HIV for nearly 10 years before Russia opted to take on a leadership position and turn down the majority of funding.

That move has led to more scrutiny of Russia's own handling of the HIV epidemic, with many activists warning that the government is not doing enough.

Several Russian NGOs that deal with HIV/AIDS united to apply to the Global Fund for a grant this year, and the application is still pending.

According to Sarang, the results of the Justice Ministry's recent inspections suggest that Russia does not want to jeopardize that request for funding.

**See also:**

[Russia's HIV Epidemic Starts in Its Prisons]

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